

Ireland Land Records

Among Irish records, Irish land records are some with the best survival rate. In this class we will discuss some of the major types of Irish land records, what they contain, and how to access them.

LANDED ESTATE RECORDS

These records vary greatly in content, coverage, quality, and availability. They are one of few sources that may help extend a pedigree to the time before church records. Generally, they are un-indexed and available only in Ireland or the United Kingdom. To use them, you must know who your people were leasing their property from, and then how to find the records. Among the most valuable contents (genealogically speaking):

Lists of tenants

Maps of estates

Details of leases (rentals)

- *Lease of lives*—three people named on lease. Terms of lease could not be changed until all three of the people named have passed away. Often times therefore the youngest living family members are named. (Sometimes people would name the youngest member of the royal family.) The overseer of the estate was responsible to track the deaths of the people named on the lease, even if those people were no longer in Ireland. Consequently, there is some correspondence connected with estates where the overseer is writing to people in America etc. who he knows know the person in question. Therefore, neighbors of an Irish immigrant may prove important.
- *One life and 21 years*—twenty-one years after the death of the person named on the lease
- *Tenant at will*—these could be evicted at any time and had no lease. Many of the evictions that occurred during the Famine were of tenants at will. These people were so poor that they probably could not afford to emigrate, unless they were assisted by the landlord or the poor law union.

Overseer accounts - On the left hand side of the page you will find what the landlord wants done. On the right hand of the page you will find the response from the overseer as to what was done.

Correspondence, evictions, and emigration - One reason for correspondence is mentioned above. Lists of tenants that the landlord “assisted” to emigrate can sometimes be found. (A few of these are in the Ordnance Survey Memoirs. These were indexed in William Filby’s *Passenger and Immigration Lists Index*, www.ancestry.com).

Encumbered Estates—During the Famine, many landlords had to forfeit their mortgaged estates due to a decrease in rental income. The Encumbered Estates Court was created to handle these cases. These contain lists of tenants and other items. The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland has volumes of Rentals of Encumbered Estates. The FHL has these on microfilms 258793-258850.

Some of these are indexed in: Parsons, Joyce and Jeanne Jensen. *Index to Irish films at the Family History Library: includes names from wills, land and court documents, genealogies, pedigrees, and special collections.* [Salt Lake City: J & J Ltd., 1995-1999] FHL Ref 941.5 D22pj v. 1-5, films 1559440 it 11, 1696675 it 9, 1145946 it 2, 1145974 it 8, and 1162455 it 6 respectively, also FHL CD ROM 601 on the FHL patron desktop.

*One problem is many tenants sublet, making it difficult to find rentals and other estate records for them.

How to Find the Landlord

Landed Estates database—if your ancestor was in Connaught or Munster provinces (basically, Clare, Cork, Donegal, Galway, Kerry, Leitrim, Limerick, Mayo, Roscommon, Sligo, Tipperary, or Waterford), you have a variety of search types available online at www.landedestates.ie.

- **Griffith's Valuation**—the “immediate lessor” column. Look for the lessor's name in the lessee's column to verify if they were a freeholder (“in fee”) or just subletting. Identify not only who your people rented from, but also the major landowner in the area. See www.askaboutireland.ie, www.irishorigins.com or www.ancestry.com for Griffith's Valuation.
- **Registry of Deeds**—Lands Index to see how the townland changed hands through the years—especially at critical junctures such as deaths.
- *Land owners in Ireland to which is added a summary for each province and for all Ireland: return of owners of land of one acre and upwards. . . 1876* (FHL 941.5 R2ir)
- **Lewis's Topographical Dictionary of Ireland** <http://www.libraryireland.com/topog/>
- **Parliamentary Gazetteer of Ireland** (FHL Brit Ref 941.5 E5p, film 824043-5, fiche 6020358-82)
- *The Landowners of Ireland. An Alphabetical List of the owners of Estates of 500 Acres of 500£ valuation and upwards, in Ireland. . . .* (FHL film#526490)
- *Taylor and Skinner's maps of the roads of Ireland, surveyed 1777* (FHL Brit 941.5 E7ts)
- Local history/Heritage Centre (www.rootsireland.ie)
- **Burke's peerage and landed gentry books** to see where all of their estates were located. Often absentee landlords were from England so their papers have ended up in English repositories.
- **Directories -**
- **Freeholder's Lists**—sometimes give details of the lease (see below)

How to Find the Landlord's Estate Records

The FHL has very few (one notable exception being the Abercorn papers, which cover estates that the Abercorn family owned in Tyrone and Donegal).

To locate the records at the FHL:

- Try a keyword search using the landlord's surname and the county the estate was located in.
- Browse the Library Catalog under Ireland > Land and Property or Ireland > Manors. Check under the same topics on the county and parish level as well.
- Check *Smith's Inventory of Genealogical Sources: Ireland* (FHL 941.5 D23s v.1-32; FHL fiche 6110527, 18 fiche) for records available at the FHL.

To locate the records in Ireland:

- **Sources: A National Library of Ireland database for Irish research**, [online database] National Library of Ireland, 2011. <http://sources.nli.ie>. Fully searchable catalogue/list of source manuscripts and periodical articles. Contains all 23 volumes of Hayes' publications (for a description of Hayes by volume, see www.familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Hayes_Manuscript_and_Periodical_Sources_for_Irish_Research).
- “Collections in Private Keeping.” *Analecta Hibemica*. Vol 20, pg. 311. (FHL Brit 941.5 B2ah v. 20)
- PRONI Guide to Landed Estate Records (FHL Ref Q 941.6 R23ni v.1-2)
- County Libraries—use the Directory of Irish Archives (FHL 941.5 A34h)
- Heritage Centres (www.rootsireland.ie)
- The Irish Genealogical Society and National Library of Ireland have combined to produce some indexes to Estate records in Ireland. These exist for Armagh, Cavan, Cork, Donegal, Fermanagh, Galway, Leitrim, Mayo, Monaghan, Roscommon, Sligo, Tyrone, Waterford and Lismore Estate. These are available if one becomes a member of the St Paul, Minnesota based society.
- Deputy Keepers Reports (for both Dublin and Belfast).
- National Register of Archives www.nationalarchives.gov.uk (under “Search other archives”). ARCHON has indexed much of what are in the Deputy Keeper's Reports and what is at the National Library of Ireland, plus new material.
- Check Irish repository websites
 - Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast, www.proni.gov.uk
 - National Archive of Ireland, Dublin, www.nationalarchives.ie
 - National Library of Ireland, Dublin, www.nli.ie

To locate records in England (often absentee landlords were English, so their papers ended up in English repositories):

- National Register of Archives www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/nra makes available on-line the contents of 44,000 unpublished catalogs to manuscripts and historical records. The private papers (including estate records) of many families may be found in this collection. You can search the register by organization, business, personal name, family name, and place-name (the “seat” of a family, or estates they may have owned).
- Access to Archives (a2a) www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/
- National Inventory of Documentary Sources (NIDS, www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~bifhsusa/nids/index.html) and
- Guides to English County Record Offices (FHL catalog under [County] – Archives and Libraries – handbooks, etc.

For more information on Estate records and what they contain, see www.proni.gov.uk.

REGISTRY OF DEEDS

The Registry of Deeds was established in 1708 to protect Protestant landowning interest. A deed was registered so there could be no dispute in court at a later date. By the 19th century, many Catholics and Presbyterians were also registering deeds. The office was called the Registry of Deeds, now located in Henrietta St, Dublin 1. A written transcript of each deed was made, called a memorial. The FHL has microfilmed the transcripts of these memorials from 1708 to 1929. Indexes are by surname (of grantor only) or by place (townland or barony). The index by place is called *county index*.

It is good to check for deeds even though a very small number of people actually filed a deed. Mostly those who filed did so because they wanted to protect themselves against litigation.

The term deed was loosely interpreted and so there are various kinds of documents that are included in the deeds. The following are the types of documents you will find:

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|------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| ○ Leases | ○ Wills |
| ○ Marriage Settlements | ○ Sales, Assignments or Conveyances |
| ○ Mortgages | ○ Rent Charges |
| ○ Bills of Discovery | |

Before searching, you must know:

- The time period in which you want to find a deed.
- The names of the people you want to look for.
- It is helpful but not necessary to know a barony, parish, or county where the people lived or owned property.
- To search the County Index, you need to know the name of the townland.

A three step process is used to locate the Memorial or abstract of Deed.

Step 1. Search the Surname Index and/or the County Index to the Registry of Deeds.

- The Surname Index is really a grantor index. It only lists those people who are disposing of the property.
- The County index is an index by the name of the townland. It is arranged by county and then alphabetically by the first letter in the name of the townland. After 1828 it is arranged first by county, then barony, and then townland (townlands where the barony was not identified are in their own index).
- There is an ongoing volunteer project to index these records, available at http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~registryofdeeds/by_number/indexed.htm, or Google “**Ireland Registry of Deeds.**” If not found on this website, you will need to use the microfilm indexes.

- To find film numbers, search the Library Catalog using a "title" search and the words *Transcripts of memorials of deeds, conveyances and wills, 1708-1929*.
- Search the index by time period and by name or by county and townland name.
- Obtain the volume and page number from the index.

Step 2. Search for the Memorial or Abstracts of Deeds.

- To find film numbers, search the Library Catalog using a "Keyword" search and the words *Transcripts of memorials of deeds, conveyances and wills, 1708-1929*.
- Obtain the microfilm number for the volume you need.
- Look up the abstract by volume and page number. The page numbers are often wrong, but the deed numbers are not. Deed numbers may skip but they are in order.

Step 3. Locate records not available at the Family History Library.

- The original records are kept at the Registry of Deeds, Henrietta St, Dublin 1, Ireland.

FREEHOLDERS REGISTERS

A freeholder held his property either in fee (owns it), or by lease for one or more lives (such as the term of his life or the term of three lives named in the lease). A tenant who held land for a defined period such as 31 years or 300 years was not considered a freeholder. The value of the freehold (amount varied over time) entitled the freeholder to vote. Books recording freeholders who registered to vote are called freeholders registers, while records of voters and who they voted for are called Poll Books.

These records start in 1727, but excluded Catholics until 1793. Freeholders registers are arranged by the county and sometimes the barony. A freeholders register may contain information about each freeholder and freehold:

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|---|---|
| 1. Name of freeholder | 5. the value of the freehold |
| 2. Abode (address) of freeholder | 6. Names of other lives in lease |
| 3. Occupation and religion of freeholder | 7. Landlord 's name and address |
| 4. Location of the freehold | 8. Date and place registered |

A freeholders register can help pinpoint where an ancestor was living within a county, which is vitally important if the church records were destroyed. People named as "lives" in leases were often related to the leaseholder, so family relationships may be suggested by the freeholders list. PRONI has digitized and indexed over 5,500 pre-1840 freeholders' registers and poll books for Northern Ireland, found online at <http://applications.proni.gov.uk/Freeholders/default.aspx>.

Unfortunately, many original manuscript freeholders' registers were destroyed in the Public Record Office fire of 1922. However, some freeholders' registers were published prior to the fire, such as in newspapers. The County Roscommon Family History Society has, for example, published some County Roscommon freeholders lists found in 1830's newspapers. Copies of freeholders' registers were sometimes kept by private individuals, such as landowners who wanted to know what voting freeholders lived on their estates. For this reason, copies of freeholders' lists are found among the papers of landed estate owners. The National Archives of Ireland, the National Library of Ireland, and the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland each have valuable collections of both freeholders' registers and landed estate records.

Kyle J. Betit's article "*Freeholders, Freeman and Voting Registers*" in **The Irish At Home and Abroad** lists known surviving freeholders records for every county in Ireland (Back issues of The Irish At Home and Abroad are available from GlobalGenealogy.com). Other freeholders records not listed in that article may be found in some other inventories, such as (1) <http://sources.nli.ie>, which has over 180,000 references, including the card catalog of the NLI; (2) James G. Ryan's book *Irish Records*; and (3) John Grenham's book *Tracing Your Irish Ancestors*, which lists many records at the (National Library of Ireland (NLI)).

TITHE APPLLOTMENT

- Tithe Applotment, 1823-1837 tax record. Contains heads of households only, covers both those who leased land as well as those who owned land. Because it was based on land holding, the Tithe has few records for cities or large towns. It has been estimated that it contains only 40% of all heads of households.
- Indexed on FamilySearch.org as part of www.familysearch.org/search (or browse collections for Ireland)
- Index and images free online at www.familysearch.org and titheapplotmentbooks.nationalarchives.ie; and indexes online at www.ancestry.com.
- Found in the Family History Library Catalog (FHLC) under Ireland—Land and Property *Tithe Applotment Books and Indexes, for Northern Ireland, 1822 - 1837* or *Applotment Books, abt. 1824-1840* for the Republic.

OTHER VALUATION RECORDS: HOUSE, FIELD & TENURE BOOKS

- There were several surveys taken under the direction of Richard Griffith in preparation for the Primary Valuation. Among these are Field Books, Tenure Books, House Books and Quarto Books.
- Find in the Library Catalog using a **keyword** search with the words **Ireland Tenure Quarto**. They may also be found in the Library Catalog under Ireland and then the topic “Land and Property,” then look for the title “**Valuation Books**” with the author “Ireland. General Valuation Office.”
- The FHL has filmed the House books, Field books, Tenure books, and Quarto books. Although it was filmed at the National Archives in Dublin, it does contain much material for Northern Ireland.

HOUSE BOOKS:

- There was a stipulation that a house only be valued if it was worth £3 and later £5. However in many counties they valued homes that were way under that limit. The names of the occupiers of each house are listed. These books cover the late 1820s to the early 1850s.
- The house books describe the size and quality of the house. Here is what the letters meant (from Reilly, p. 18, see sources below):

New or Nearly New

- A+** Built or ornamented with cut stone, and of superior solidity, and finish.
- A** Very substantial building, and finish, without cut stone ornament
- A-** Ordinary building and finish or either of the above when built 20 or 25 years.

Medium

- B+** Medium (not new) but in sound order, and good repair
- B** Medium, slightly decayed, but in good repair
- B-** Medium, deteriorated by age, not in perfect repair

Old

- C+** Old, but in repair
- C** Old and out of repair
- C-** Old, and dilapidated, scarcely habitable

Each letter was further qualified with the number 1, 2 or 3:

- 1** Slated roof house of stone or brick with lime mortar
- 2** Thatched roof house of stone or brick with lime mortar
- 3** Thatched house of stone walls with mud mortar or mud walls of the best kind
- 4** Basement stories of slated houses used as dwellings

QUARTO BOOKS:

- Quarto books are House books for large towns.

FIELD BOOKS:

- The field books were created by the valuers looking at the soil in every parish in all of Ireland. A description of the soils and its worth is given.
- The content varies. In some areas, the valuers added the names of the occupiers to the field books. Field books for counties Cork, Dublin, Kerry and Limerick give occupiers' names for all parishes, and the books for Carlow, Westmeath, Wexford, and Wicklow give occupiers names for most parishes. Other counties only give occupiers names for a few parishes.

TENURE BOOKS:

- Tenure books describe the type of lease each tenement was held under. Includes names of all of the tenement holders.

GRIFFITH'S VALUATION

- Griffith's Primary General Valuation, 1848-1864 tax record. Contains heads of households only, covers both those who leased land as well as those who owned land. It has an estimated coverage of 80-90% of all heads of households.
- Found in the FHLC under Ireland—Land and Property *General Valuation of Rateable Property in Northern Ireland, 1858-1864* or *General Valuation of Rateable Property, 1847-1861* for the Republic.
- John Grenham's *Irish Record Finder*, FHL CD 1801 (easier to use on FHL B2 computers CD-1 and CD-2) maps surname distribution to the parish level based on Griffith's.
- Indexes and images for Griffith's Valuation can be found for free online at www.askaboutireland.ie, or on subscriptions sites such as www.irishorigins.com (\$ - this site also has some of the Griffith's maps), and www.ancestry.com.

VALUATION/REVISION LISTS, CANCEL BOOKS, OR CANCELLATION BOOKS

- These are Valuation Lists covering from the 1850's into the 20th century. They are lists of occupiers kept after the Primary Valuation. You may be able to trace who held a tenement from generation to generation in these books. The Valuation Lists are arranged backwards on the microfilm at the FHL. The beginning of the film has the newest books and the books get older as you continue in the film.
- Indexes and images can be found free online for Northern Ireland at www.proni.gov.uk.
- Index and images for the Republic of Ireland can be found on microfilm at the Family History Library. The film numbers for each parish are in the process of being listed on the FamilySearch Research Wiki. In the FHLC, they are cataloged under the county and then "Land and Property" and then by Poor Law Union (PLU) and then by District Electoral Division (DED). Also use www.seanruad.com to ascertain the PLU. Use the FHL Catalog record for the townland in the 1911 census to find the DED. Locate the 1911 census FHLC record by doing a 'Keyword' search for the townland.

SOURCES AND SUGGESTED READING

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